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ABSTRACT

Mentoring programs depend on a complex personal and professional relationship between a novice teacher and a veteran teacher. The study described here was designed to add to the knowledge of mentor roles, benefits of mentoring, and obstacles to mentoring. This report is based on the first of two meetings with a diverse group of mentor teachers (N=24). During the meeting, subjects were asked to describe and categorize related elements which expressed their ideas of mentoring roles, benefits, and obstacles. Consistent with the literature, findings indicate that: subjects appeared to be the most at ease discussing mentor roles and the most uncomfortable discussing obstacles to mentoring; subjects clearly drew on their own experiences as mentors in discussing roles and benefits; and they often found it difficult to classify elements cited. As a group, teachers emphasized assisting beginning teachers in terms of curriculum and instructional needs and providing them with ongoing professional support and encouragement. The subjects generally described the mentor as somone serving as a coach or a quasi-mentor, and less frequently as a role model or a mentor who had significant personal and professional influence on a novice teacher. (Contains 15 references.) (LL)

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How Mentors Describe and Categorize Their Ideas about Mentor Roles, Benefits of Mentoring, and Obstacles to Mentoring

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February 16, 1993

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Introduction

Interest in the mentoring of beginning teachers by experienced teachers continues during the early 1990s in spite of tight budgets. For example, a collaborative effort between Milwaukee Public Schools and the Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association resulted in implementing a new mentoring program in January, 1992. In this program, which continues today with some modifications, veteran teachers are released from their regular teaching responsibilities to serve full-time as mentors for beginning teachers. However, mentoring is also being scrutinized more closely. Although it has traditionally been a preferred alternative to a "sink-or-swim" induction into teaching, limitations of what can be expected of mentoring are surfacing, particularly viewed within the structure and context of schools, and school reform efforts (Healy & Welchert, 1990; Lawson, 1992; Little, 1990; Schlechty & Whitford, 1989).

Despite glaring differences in many important features of mentoring programs, including mentor selection and training, pairing of mentors with beginning teachers, provisions of release time and incentives, and relationship to other components of teacher induction and inservice programs, mentoring programs depend on a complex personal and professional relationship between a novice teacher and a veteran teacher. The roles and functions of mentors--what mentors do and what mentors are--are central to understanding this relationship. Analyses of mentoring activities have appeared with increasing frequency in the literature on mentoring (Anderson & Enz, 1990; Odell, 1990; Neal, 1992; Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992). Likewise, more attention is being paid to the benefits of mentoring for the beginning teacher, the mentor teacher, and others (Ishler & Edelfelt, 1989; Gordon, 1991; Hofsess, 1990; Niles, McLaughlin, Wildman, & Magliaro, 1989; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). In general, the obstacles or impediments to effective mentoring are treated more indirectly. They are often linked to the selection and training of mentors, the pairing of

mentors with beginning teachers, and the frequently awkward fit between mentoring as an activity requiring certain resources (e.g., time for meetings and classroom visits) and the ability of schools and school districts to provide these resources (Stupiansky & Wolfe, 1992). In other instances, the obstacles are related to ambiguously defined roles and responsibilities for mentors and beginning teachers, role conflicts (e.g., teachers being absent from their own classrooms in order to participate in mentoring activities), or mixed messages about the purposes and perceived value of mentoring.

My purpose in this research report is to add to the knowledge of mentor roles, benefits of mentoring, and obstacles to mentoring as reported by a diverse group of mentors.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-four teachers who were serving or who had recently served as mentors for beginning teachers volunteered for participation in this study. Twenty-three were employed as teachers at the time of our meetings, and one had recently retired. They worked in one of ten difference public school districts ranging in student enrollment from less than 400 to more than 100,000. Eleven subjects worked in urban school districts and 13 subjects worked in a non-urban school districts.

Insert Table 1 about here

Seventeen subjects reported participating in one form of mentor training and six reported taking part in two forms of mentor training. Training cited included (1) year-long participation in a university-based mentoring program as a mentor or (2) as a beginning teacher, (3) one or two day workshops sponsored by school districts or (4) by a local educational service agency, and (5) completion of a college course in the supervision of student teachers. One subject reported no training. The subjects

reported to have served as mentors for between one and eight beginning teachers (Mean = 2.04; SD = 1.73). More information about the subjects is found in Table 1.

Design and Procedure

This report is based on the first of two meetings with each subject between December 7, 1991, and March 11, 1992. The meetings were tape-recorded, transcribed, and ranged in length from 16 to 77 minutes, with a mean of 34.38 minutes (SD = 14.87). If the two longest meetings and the two shortest meetings (77, 63, 18, and 16 minutes) are eliminated, the mean is 32.55 minutes for the remaining meetings (SD = 9.67). Meetings were held at the convenience of the subjects at their homes, in their schools, or at my office, and continued until the tasks were completed.

During the meeting, I randomly assigned three tasks for the subjects to complete. (1) **Mentor roles.** I asked subjects to describe briefly the sorts of things they did in serving as a mentor. As they did this, I wrote on an index card the key words or phrase for each mentor role **element** given, asking for clarification as necessary, and presenting the card to the subjects for their approval as to accuracy. I placed the index cards in the view of the subjects as the task proceeded. When the subjects had exhausted their thoughts on the topic of mentor roles, I then asked them to put the elements into groups, to create a **category** name for each group of elements, and to explain how the elements in each category related to one another. I followed the same procedure as I asked the subjects to describe and categorize their ideas about (2) **Benefits of mentoring** and (3) **Obstacles to mentoring**.

Data Analysis

The total number of elements generated by the subjects in describing their ideas about mentor roles, benefits of mentoring, and obstacles to mentoring is shown in Table 2, and the total number of categories which they used in categorizing these elements is shown in Table 3. Additional

information about the mean number of elements and the mean number of categories is displayed in Table 4 and Table 5, respectively.

Insert Tables 2, 3, 4, 5 about here

Subsequently, I analyzed the 687 elements which the subjects cited according to content. During this step, I separated 33 of these elements into two different categories, and I placed two elements into three different categories. This resulted in a grand total of 726 elements, as displayed in Table 6. Summaries of my content analysis of elements are displayed in Table 7, Table 8, and Table 9.

Insert Tables 6, 7, 8, 9 about here

Results

Elements Cited

As shown in Table 2, the 24 subjects cited 687 elements in discussing their ideas about what mentors do (285 elements--41.5%), the benefits of mentoring (217 elements--31.6%), and the obstacles to mentoring (185 elements--26.9%). Table 4 also shows some notable differences in mean number of elements cited by subjects within various categories. For example, middle school mentors cited the least number of elements for each of the three topics, females cited 21% more obstacle elements than men, mentors with 10 to 20 years of teaching experiences cited approximately 50% more obstacle

elements than did their junior and senior colleagues, and mentors in non-urban school districts cited almost twice as many role elements as did mentors in urban districts.

Categories Cited

As shown in Table 3, the subjects created 248 categories when asked to put related elements together. Of these 248 categories, they used 91 (36.7%) to classify role elements, 78 (31.5%) to classify benefit elements, and 79 (31.9%) to classify obstacle elements. Table 5 shows that the subjects used a mean of 10.33 categories to classify all their elements. When examined in terms of sub-groups, the greatest difference in number of categories used exits between those mentors with more than 20 years of experience and those with fewer years of experience. The more senior mentors used over 40% more categories to classify their mentor role elements than did the others, suggesting more differentiation among types of elements. In addition, mentors with up to 20 years of teaching experience used a third more categories to classify obstacles to mentoring than did the mentors with more teaching experience.

In creating categories for role elements, several subjects used complementary categories. For example, one elementary mentor classified mentor roles as "person-to-person" and "professional-to-professional." Other pairings of categories included the mentor relating to the beginning teacher in terms of support and "cheerleading," and relating to the beginner in terms of "the job of teaching." Another example is "Things that could be done by anyone else" and tasks that a mentor is in a better position to handle. One notable exception to this pattern was a middle school mentor. His categories for mentor roles were presented chronologically, from an "introductory phase," through a focus on discipline and classroom management, and ending with an emphasis on curriculum.

For the most part, the subjects' categories for benefit elements focused on the beneficiaries, usually limited to the beginning teacher and the mentor. One exception to this was a subject who

created three categories to classify her benefit elements: (1) "Direct" (for the beginning teacher), (2) "Frosting on the cake" (for the mentor), and "Down the road" (for children, parents, and taxpayers). Frequently the categories generated were complementary: professional and personal, tangible and intangible, and surface and underlying.

There were fewer discernible patterns among categories used for classifying obstacle elements than among categories used for classifying role or benefit elements. For some subjects, the categories used in classifying obstacle elements were nearly identical to the elements themselves. For example, "Time" was frequently used as a category for difficulties encountered in arranging for meetings between mentors and their beginning teachers, or for conducting classroom observations. In other cases, similar or even identical elements were included in quite different categories. For instance, a mismatch between beginning teachers and their mentors with respect to teaching assignment was included by one subject in the category "Responsibilities of Administration," and by another subject in the category "Problems that may prevent perfect blending of beginning teacher and mentor." Interestingly, another subject included the element "Lack of knowledge of a specific grade level or content" under the category "Interferences affecting mentor" rather than under another category she created, "Interferences affecting both mentor and beginner equally."

Content Analysis of Elements

The summary of my content analysis of elements cited by the subjects as a group and according to teaching assignment is provided in Table 7 (Mentor Roles), Table 8 (Benefits of Mentoring), and Table 9 (Obstacles to Mentoring). In all three cases, the four most frequent types of elements account for about half of all the elements: 49.1% for mentor roles, 53.7% for benefits of mentoring, and 52.4% for obstacles to mentoring. Further pooling of the different types of elements based on similarities provides for the emergence of some additional patterns, as shown in Table 10

(Mentor Roles), Tables 11 and 12 (Benefits of Mentoring), and Table 13 (Obstacles to Mentoring).

Insert Tables 10, 11, 12, 13 about here

Discussion

Like induction or assistance programs for beginning teachers in general, formally established mentoring program vary widely with respect to goals, organization, and share of resources. It is also true that the veteran teachers serving as mentors in such programs experience a considerable range of support with respect to training and carrying out their mentor roles and functions. This is certainly true among the 24 mentors who participated in this study. While approximately half of them had extended training (about ten 2 1/2 hour sessions over an entire year), many others had only three or four hours of training at the beginning of the school year, frequently with no follow-up.

In general, the subjects appeared to be the most at ease discussing mentor roles and the most uncomfortable discussing obstacles to mentoring. In addition, they clearly drew on their own experiences as mentors in discussing roles and benefits, whereas they were more hypothetical and tentative in discussing obstacles. Finally, they often found it difficult to classify the elements they cited, though less so with benefits than with roles and obstacles.

The elements generated by these subjects in describing their ideas about what mentors do, benefits of mentoring, and obstacles to mentoring generally support the research. As a group, they emphasized assisting beginning teachers in terms of curriculum and instructional needs, and providing them with on-going professional support and encouragement. However, their focus on these topics was largely to the exclusion of other broader topics, both personal and professional. Their somewhat limited vision of mentor roles and functions may be related to the obstacles to mentoring which they

cite, many of which contribute to the impression that mentoring is an unclearly defined and poorly supported professional development activity. This less comprehensive vision of mentoring can also be seen in the subjects' description of the benefits of mentoring which are limited almost entirely to beginning teachers and their mentor. Only rarely do the subjects include other beneficiaries of mentoring such as the children in school. Interpreting the data in light of Head, Reisman, and Thies-Sprinthall's (1992) two dimensional conceptualization of the mentor-protege relationship, it seems that the subjects of this study generally describe the mentor as someone serving as a coach or a quasi-mentor, and less frequently as a role-model or a mentor who has significant personal and professional influence on a novice teacher.

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Table 1

Characteristics of Subjects

	n	Gender		Teaching Experience in Years (mean)	Urban or Non-Urban Distr		Number of beginning teachers served (mean)	Type of mentor training cited by subjects[1]					
		M	F		U	Non		A	B	C	D	E	F
All subjects													
	24	**6**	**18**	**15.00**	**11**	**13**	**2.04**	**10**	**2**	**4**	**10**	**3**	**1**
By assignment													
Elementary	9	1	8	17.78	1	8	1.89	6	1	1	5	0	0
Middle	5	3	2	15.00	4	1	3.40	3	0	0	1	1	1
High	5	2	3	12.40	3	2	1.40	0	1	1	3	1	0
Special Ed	5	0	5	12.60	3	2	1.60	1	0	2	1	1	0

[1]A = University-based mentoring program as mentor
B = University-based mentoring program as a beginning teacher
C = School district
D = Educational service agency
E = Supervision of student teaching course
F = No training

Note. Three elementary school mentors cited Training A and Training D, one elementary mentor cited Training A and Training C, one middle school mentor cited Training D and Training E, and one high school mentor cited Training C and Training D.

Table 2

Total Number of Elements Cited

	n	Roles ele	Roles percent	Benefits ele	Benefits percent	Obstacles ele	Obstacles percent	Total
All subjects								
	24	**285**	**41.5**	**217**	**31.6**	**185**	**26.9**	**687**
By assignment								
Elementary	9	127	46.0	85	30.8	64	26.0	276
Middle	5	41	35.3	40	34.5	35	30.2	116
High	5	51	36.7	45	32.4	43	30.9	139
Special Ed	5	66	42.3	47	30.1	43	27.6	156

Table 3

Total Number of Categories Cited

	n	Roles cat	Roles percent	Benefits cat	Benefits percent	Obstacles cat	Obstacles percent	Total
All subjects								
	24	**91**	**36.7**	**78**	**31.5**	**79**	**31.9**	**248**
By assignment								
Elementary	9	36	38.3	29	30.9	29	30.9	94
Middle	5	17	35.4	17	34.4	14	29.2	48
High	5	17	32.1	17	32.1	19	35.8	53
Special Ed	5	21	39.6	15	28.3	17	32.1	53

Table 4

Mean Number of Elements Cited

	n	Roles		Benefits		Obstacles		Combined	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
All subjects									
	24	**11.88**	**6.50**	**9.04**	**2.73**	**7.71**	**2.99**	**28.63**	**7.75**
By assignment									
Elementary	9	14.11	5.82	9.44	2.44	7.11	2.37	30.67	5.77
Middle	5	8.20	1.92	8.00	4.00	7.00	3.08	23.20	6.22
High	5	10.20	5.17	9.00	2.45	8.60	4.98	27.80	8.44
Special Ed	5	13.20	10.52	9.40	2.97	8.60	1.52	31.20	10.66
By gender									
Male	6	11.33	6.56	9.00	2.10	6.67	2.16	27.00	7.63
Female	18	12.06	6.66	9.06	2.96	8.06	3.19	29.17	7.99
By experience									
To 10 yrs	5	11.15	7.26	7.83	2.64	6.17	2.23	25.67	7.74
10-20	13	11.67	6.12	9.31	3.00	9.08	3.07	29.54	8.02
Over 20	6	14.00	5.52	9.80	1.64	6.00	1.87	29.80	7.76
By district									
Urban	11	7.91	1.45	9.00	3.00	7.18	2.32	24.09	4.81
Non-urban	13	15.23	7.25	9.08	2.60	8.15	3.48	32.46	7.82

Table 5

Mean Number of Categories

	n	Roles		Benefits		Obstacles		Combined	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
All subjects									
	24	**3.79**	**1.50**	**3.25**	**1.19**	**3.29**	**1.12**	**10.33**	**2.90**
By assignment									
Elementary	9	4.00	2.06	3.22	1.20	3.22	0.97	10.44	3.71
Middle	5	3.40	0.89	3.40	1.67	2.80	1.48	9.60	2.61
High	5	3.40	0.89	3.40	1.14	3.80	1.30	10.60	2.41
Special Ed	5	4.20	1.48	3.00	1.00	3.40	0.89	10.60	2.70
By gender									
Male	6	3.17	0.98	3.00	1.41	2.50	1.22	8.67	2.07
Female	18	4.00	1.61	3.33	1.14	3.56	0.98	10.89	2.97
By experience									
To 10 yrs	5	3.46	1.20	3.33	0.82	3.50	0.53	10.33	1.86
10-20	13	3.50	0.84	3.00	1.15	3.46	1.13	9.92	2.40
Over 20	6	5.00	2.35	3.80	1.64	2.60	1.52	11.40	4.98
By district									
Urban	11	3.36	1.03	3.27	1.35	3.09	1.04	9.73	2.49
Non-urban	13	4.15	1.77	3.23	1.09	3.46	1.20	10.85	3.21

Table 6

Total Number of Elements Subjected to Content Analysis

	n	Roles ele	Roles percent	Benefits ele	Benefits percent	Obstacles ele	Obstacles percent	Total
All subjects								
	24	**301**	**41.5**	**238**	**32.8**	**187**	**25.8**	**726**
By assignment								
Elementary	9	134	46.2	91	31.4	66	22.8	290
Middle	5	45	36.6	43	35.0	35	28.5	123
High	5	53	36.3	49	33.6	44	30.1	146
Special Ed	5	69	41.3	55	32.9	43	25.7	167

Note. Thirty-three elements cited by the subjects during the meeting were subsequently placed into two categories during analysis, and three elements cited during the meeting were subsequently placed into three categories during analysis. This accounts for the difference in the number of elements shown in Table 2 and Table 6.

Table 7

Analysis of Elements Associated with Mentor Roles

	Description of element	Assignment Ele	Mid	High	Spec	Sum	Percent of Total
1	Provide support, encouragement	22	17	10	5	54	17.9
2	Inform about policies, procedures, paperwork	21	7	10	12	50	16.6
3	Inform about school culture, expectations, staff	8	6	4	6	24	8.0
4	Help with lesson plans, materials	7	3	4	6	20	6.6
5	Help with discipline, classroom management	8	3	4	2	17	5.6
6	Provide link to other personnel	10	1	1	5	17	5.6
7	Inform about job, benefits, insurance, extracurricular activities	5	1	4	3	13	4.3
8	Help with teaching skills, grading	6	1	2	4	13	4.3
9	Meet with BT[1] regularly	10	0	3	0	13	4.3
10	Information about special education	1	1	1	8	11	3.7
11	Observe BT, be observed by BT	4	1	4	2	11	3.7
12	Help obtain materials, supplies	3	1	0	5	9	3.0
13	Protect and guard BT, serve as buffer	6	1	1	0	8	2.7
14	Help in communicating with parents	5	0	0	3	8	2.7
15	Attend programs and inservices with BT	4	0	2	1	7	2.3
16	Familiarize with building, facilities	2	0	1	4	7	2.3
17	Participate in mentor training	6	0	0	0	6	2.0
18	Develop friendship with BT	4	1	1	0	6	2.0
19	Help set up classroom, bulletin boards	2	1	0	1	4	1.3
20	Inform BT about professional organizations, workshops	0	0	1	2	3	1.0
	TOTAL	**134**	**45**	**53**	**69**	**301**	**99.9**

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher

Table 8

Analysis of Elements Associated with Benefits of Mentoring

	Description of element	Assignment Ele	Mid	High	Spec	Sum	Percent of Total
1	For BT[1], support and encouragement	13	10	9	14	46	19.3
2	For MT[2], learning new ideas, renewal	16	3	6	7	32	13.4
3	For MT, satisfaction in helping someone	11	6	5	7	29	12.2
4	For BT, fitting into school, learn about staff as resources	8	2	4	7	21	8.8
5	For BT, improve skills; get better, faster	5	3	4	5	17	7.1
6	For MT, reflection and introspection	7	1	2	3	13	5.7
7	For BT, learning about policies, procedures, ordering supplies	4	3	3	0	10	4.2
8	For BT, staying in teaching, smoother transition from college to work	3	3	3	0	9	3.8
9	For MT, learning more about colleagues in school and in other schools/districts	5	0	1	1	7	2.9
10	For MT, new role and responsibilities	2	1	1	3	7	2.9
11	For MT, honor and recognition	2	1	3	1	7	2.9
12	For BT, help with curriculum, materials	2	1	0	4	7	2.9
13	For BT, help in dealing with children	2	1	2	2	7	2.9
14	Less need for BT to go to administrator	0	5	0	1	5	2.1
15	For BT, information on job	1	0	3	4	4	1.7
16	Improved teaching for children	2	2	0	0	4	1.7
17	Good image and PR for district	1	1	1	0	3	1.3
18	For MT, financial reward, college credits	2	0	1	0	3	1.3
19	For BT, help in teaching, report cards	2	0	1	0	3	1.3
20	For district, more competent teachers	1	1	0	0	2	0.8
21	For BT, financial reward	2	0	0	0	2	0.8
	TOTAL	**91**	**43**	**49**	**55**	**238**	**100.0**

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher [2]MT = Mentor Teacher

Table 9

Analysis of Elements Associated with Obstacles to Mentoring

	Description of element	Assignment Ele	Mid	High	Spec	Sum	Percent of Total
1	Lack of time for meetings, observations	13	9	9	9	40	21.4
2	Personality conflicts between BT[1] and MT[2]	8	1	4	7	20	10.7
3	Lack of administrative support	7	6	3	4	20	10.7
4	New role for MT, lack of training	6	4	5	3	18	9.6
5	Mismatch between BT and MT in terms of teaching assignment, ideology	8	1	3	5	17	9.1
6	Other personal or professional interferences	4	1	1	6	12	6.4
7	Lack of physical proximity to one another	7	1	1	3	12	6.4
8	Goals of mentoring unclear, unrealistic	1	4	4	2	11	5.9
9	Roles of BT and MT unclear	2	2	5	2	11	5.9
10	Aspects of university mentoring program	4	2	4	0	10	5.3
11	Low commitment of BT and/or MT	5	2	2	1	10	5.3
12	Negative attitude of other teachers or administrators toward mentoring	0	2	0	1	3	1.6
13	Mentor selection process	0	0	2	0	2	1.1
14	Lack of incentives or rewards for MT	0	0	1	0	1	0.5
	TOTAL	**65**	**35**	**44**	**43**	**187**	**99.9**

[1]BT = Beginning Teacher [2]MT = Mentor Teacher

Table 10

Pooled Elements for Mentor Roles (Type)

Type	Elements from Table 7	Percent of Total
1 Direct help with curriculum, teaching, and related skills	4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 19	30.2
2 General support and encouragement	1, 9, 13, 18	26.9
3 Help with policies and procedures	2, 12	19.6
4 Integration into school	3, 6, 16	15.9
5 Help with teaching as a job	7, 20	5.3
6 Mentor training	17	2.0
	Total	**99.9**

Table 11

Pooled Elements for Benefits of Mentoring (by Beneficiary)

Beneficiary	Elements from Table 8	Percent of Total
1 Beginning teacher	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 19, 21	52.9
2 Mentor	2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 18	41.2
3 School or district	14, 17	3.4
4 Children	16, 20	2.5
5 Help with teaching as a job	7, 20	5.3
6 Mentor training	17	2.0
	Total	**100.0**

Table 12

Pooled Elements for Benefits of Mentoring (by Type)

Type	Elements from Table 8	Percent of Total
1 Beginning teacher's professional development	4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20	37.3
2 Positive feelings	1, 3, 11, 17	35.7
3 Mentor's professional development	2, 6, 9, 10,	24.9
4 Extrinsic rewards	18, 21	2.1
	Total	**100.0**

Table 13

Pooled Elements for Obstacles to Mentoring (Type)

Type	Elements from Table 9	Percent of Total
1 Logistical problems	1, 6, 7, 10, 14	40.0
2 Mismatch of beginning teacher/mentor	2, 5, 11	25.1
3 Lack of clarity; unfamiliarity	4, 8, 9, 13	22.5
4 Lack of support	3, 12	12.3
	Total	**100.0**